

EXTRACTS FROM A FATHER'S DIARY.

In one point nurse has failed, and failed more grievously the older the child grows (four years old); that is in the decision which is always, and the sternness which is occasionally required. She has always been too ready to give way in trifles, in fact her fondness has led her to tempt the child by displaying how easily she can be persuaded or cajoled. This state of things has led to its natural result, gradually the child has encroached more and more until skirmishes have become almost constant, nurse not necessarily giving way, but always having to fight for it. We have noticed lately that whenever she chooses one course the child selects the other, and words and arguments follow. And not only that, but perpetually the child worries and torments her, plaguing her to do something, contradicting her rudely, whining and fretting till things have reached a climax. One evening mother broached the subject to nurse, and a discussion followed as to why and wherefore. Poor nurse was very distressed, sad at the thought of her failure, and afraid of the future. With tears and sobs she protested her kindness to the child, how many times people had wondered at her patience that the L.'s nurse had said, "If my children were to behave like that to me I should feel inclined to skin them!" But the bitterest thought of all was how, after spending her life for the child, and loving her with perfect devotion, she was repaid by disobedience and rudeness, and strangest of all by no apparent love whatever in return. So at night when I came in we talked it over. It was evident that nurse must be set on the right tack somehow, and it appeared better that I should make the attempt. It would not do to let things slide, nor to allow nurse to go to the other extreme of harshness—if indeed she could bring herself to it. If possible a better way must be pointed out.

So next morning during a quiet hour I went and sat down in the nursery, having well turned over in my mind what to say. There were two incidental difficulties to be borne in mind; one

that everything must be said quietly, seriously, and in a degree cheerfully, to avoid an outburst of grief, which would itself cloud the perceptions and neutralise reason: the other to make sure by repetition that the whole subject was comprehended, for fear the mind should every now and again be diverted to a side channel by some striking idea, and the succeeding sentences be lost.

"Nurse, Mrs. J. has told me a good deal about your trouble, and what you said last night, and I want, if possible, to help you out of the difficulty. There is a way out of it, but it is not easy, and you will have to make up your mind to begin on a new plan with Helen if you mean to succeed.

"You know yourself it is absolutely necessary for you to master the child and make her obedient; this constant fighting with her will not do, you must by some means make her obey you at once, and obey instinctively and readily. You will have a struggle, but the battle must be won now or never. If you lose you must give up, it would be neither good for the child nor even endurable to yourself to go on with this state of things."

I was afraid here that our tender-hearted creature would break forth into lamentations at the idea of leaving, but she forbore.

"Now, you have only one fault in your treatment of the child, and we have observed and tried to correct it all along. You are *too* kind and affectionate to her, your heart is too soft and you cannot make up your mind to be sufficiently stern and decisive with her. Mind, I do not say she *always* wants sternness, far from it—she is as easily managed as most children. Nor, again, do I mean that she can master you and get her own way when you do make up your mind to anything; you have as much obstinacy as she has, and when it does come to a fight you can make her submit. But it is only after a struggle, and it should never come to a struggle at all. She never tries anything of the kind with us, because she knows of old that it is useless.

"You must not think she obeys us *because* we are her parents, there is no such thing as natural obedience towards parents. As a rule, when a child is spoilt and disobedient, it is the parents who have done all the mischief and taught the child disobedience. No, she obeys and, I think, loves us, because we

have made her do so. You have not done badly, do not be discouraged, she loves you far more than if you had systematically spoilt her; and you have avoided another great mistake, you have not ruled her by fear. She is afraid of no one, she does not know what fear of anyone is, and I would never have her know. Obedience through fear is a poor thing, and comes to no good; it only acts while the one person of whom the child is afraid is present, and worse than that it makes children tell lies.

"Now, what you do not understand, and what grieves you most, is, that, after all you have given her, and in spite of your fondness and patience, she does not seem to care for you, and not only that, but she is constantly contradicting, and disobeying, and even worrying you. Really her whining and bothering have lately been quite a nuisance; and the more you pet and comfort her in her troubles the worse she grows. Well, the reason is this. No child, nor indeed man, woman, nor dog or horse either, love what they do not respect, and in some degree reverence; and children at any rate have no respect for those elders who ought to be, but are not, their masters. A young child does not understand or feel what we mean by love, and what is more they do not want or ask for affection—that is, I mean, the *expression* of love. They do not like being hugged and kissed, except, of course, on occasions when they are ill or have been hurt or frightened. It bores them; but what they do want is someone they can rely on, some protector, a stronger and firmer will than their own, one who will always be ready with help and defence when needed, and who will not waver between coddling one moment and crossness the next. Play with a child, romp with it with an utter disregard of appearances, be gentle and patient, comfort it in illness, and 'kiss the place' when it is hurt, but with all this never forget that you are, and must be, master. Then the child will trust, and, with all its power, love you; it will run to you for help and sympathy in all its troubles, just as even the youngest babies like to have their father's big strong arms round them in illness, because they feel 'safe.' This rule holds good for all positions of authority and command; the captain of a man-of-war, the general of an army, down to the lieutenant, must first ensure the strictest obedience, or all their kindness and forethought for the comfort and health of their men will bring them nothing but contempt and mistrust. Schoolboys love best justice and decision. Even a doctor finds

devotion and self-sacrifice of no avail unless his patients first have confidence in his skill.

"So make the child respect you, and rely on your justice, firmness, and judgment, and she will soon love you far more than she ever has done before.

"Now you have a battle to fight, and we would help you if we could by intervening—but it would be useless, you must fight it out yourself. And the struggle will be harder for you than for the child; you will, I mean, feel it more. Fortunately you can watch your opportunity, and choose your own ground—over some trifle she will begin to fret, and then you can begin. You must make her see that you will persevere, and do not allow her to see any pain it may give you, in short make her understand that for the time being you want nothing from her but obedience, not love, nor anything else; and that no cajolery nor pettishness, no argument or temper will alter your purpose in the least. One comfort is that you may find her yield much easier than you expect; you cannot go through any trial and think it all out like this, without its impress being left on your face; and children read faces very quickly. She may in the midst of her screams catch sight of an expression of quiet determination that she has never seen in you before. That will be your opportunity to speak quietly and decisively, and she may yield at once.

"If you want to win I believe you will, for you do really love the child—and mind, it is not only she that will be better and happier for it, your character will also gain something by the trial."*

M. J.

POSTSCRIPT.—I have only to add that the event turned out better than we expected. It is some months since the above was written, and we have had no trouble. I never knew, nor shall I inquire, how the difficulty was surmounted.

* "It is really straight from our child's life-book."—*Extract from letter.* ED.